The Importance of al-wasatiyyah in Islamic Worldview

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Abstract- Al wasatiyyah is Arabic word which means moderation and balance. Down the centuries, Islam provided an entire life structure that teaches man to follow the middle ground between physical and spiritual needs, balance between worldly life and hereafter and balance between Physical universe, (micro & macro-humans, flora, fauna, inanimate environments) and metaphysical cosmos (angels, heaven, hell, jinn, satan). Thus, Islam as a seal of revealed religions is a belief system that gives to each aspect of human life without any imbalance or exaggeration and never asks people to focus only on the spiritual dimension or on material aspect of their life. It means, one must not be extreme or rigid in one aspect of the world and neglect another dimension, but he should balance his routine activities and worldly affairs, (economic, religious, political and ceremonial activities) with hereafter, on the ground that Islam believes that the healthy life is highly situated in moderate life. Based on this fact, this humble paper aims to explore the importance of moderation in Islamic worldview, with particular reference to moderation in religion. However, For the sake of article, revelation based approach will be applied to carry out this study. Finally, a brief conclusion will be provided, followed by some suggestions and recommendations.

Index Terms- Islam, moderation, religion, Qur’an, Sunnah, Wasatiyyah

I. INTRODUCTION

Islam is the seal of religion of God it deals with human affairs from cradle to death. One of the best characteristics of Islam is moderation which is known in Arabic as “Wasatiyyah” and which means middle and balance in every action of mankind religiously, politically, financially and socially, this implies that, Islam does not tolerate any sort of extremism or fanatism. It sees moderation as the best measure for human activities that will fetch peace, harmony and happiness for people. Base on this tangible fact this humble paper will explore the importance of moderation in Islam with particular reference to moderation in religion that urged by Islam. Therefore, the paper will adopt the revelation based approach to investigate the necessity of balance in religious activity according to the teaching of Islam, and Islam’s abhorrence and condemnation to any kind of extremism.

II. DEFINITIONS

The word “moderation” generally means “Middle” and “to avoid extreme” in every matter. In Arabic, it is known as Al-Wasatiyyah which means excellence, rightfully balanced, just and fair in all aspects. Balance without any excessiveness in human life. It is indeed one of the Islamic Principle. Furthermore, the term al-wasatiyyah is used in the context of the Qur’an to refer to Islamic community which is “ummattan wasatan” which means nation that having attributes of Justice, excellence and balance in order to serve as Allah’s trustworthy “witness over mankind” (Shuada ‘ala al-Nas” in this world and in the hereafter. In this regard, al-wasatiyyah can also be translated as “justly balanced quality” or “justly balance nature” of Islam and the Islamic community. The more common translation however is moderation. In the most serious note, the term al-wasatiyyah or moderation has become very famous in Muslim talk and lecture today, especially after the incident of September 11 2001 on the United State of America, that resulted to the loss of lives of hundreds of innocent people. Hence several Muslim nations struggle with the religio-political challenges posed by religious extremism, radicalism, fanatism and violence in their respective societies.

According to (Al-Zuhaili, 1991), Al Wasatiyyah is obviously a fundamental trait of Muslim personality that is in line with the objectivity of human creation purposely functioning to flourish in this worldly life with obedience and worshiping the Almighty Allah and being entitle for paradise in the hereafter. Therefore, basically, al-Wasatiyyah or moderation means a complete denial of extremism or a strong condemnation of any kind of radicalism for self interest in the name of religion. Al-wasatiyyah strongly holds the ethical attitude, scrupulous manner to demonstrate the characteristics of justice and balance in a structured and in a scientific manner. It is one of the main characteristic of Muslim Individual’s conduct and Muslim community’s living style, that shape their routine activities in balanced manner in this world and hereafter without any exaggeration or excessiveness.

References

3. Qur’an, 2: 143

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III. QURANIC PRINCIPLE OF AL-WASATIYAH

As a matter of fact, the meaning of al-wasatiyyah in Quranic worldview and which makes the Ummah suitable to become “witness over mankind” is justice (Al-‘adl) which means justice to Allah SWT, justice to religion of Tawhid, justice to human being, justice to creatures, and justice to nature and oneself. Because, Almighty Allah dislikes injustice. According to the holy Qur’an, Allah said:

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنِكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَاطًا لِتَنْكِحُوا أُمَّةً جَعَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ شِهِدًا ٌ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونُ الَّذِينَ أَلْبَسُوا الْحَرْثَ شَهِيدً َ َ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْفِتْرَةَ آلِيَةً كَتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِتُبْعَلَ مِنْ يَدَّ الْحَقَّ مِنْ يَمْعَلِي عَلَى غَفْرَانِيَةٍ إِنَّ كَانَتْ لَكَ بِكُبْرَةٍ إِلَّا عَلَى الْذِّينَ هَدَأْنَا اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضِيعَ إِيمَّانَكُمْ إِنَّللهَ يَبْتَغِيِّ لِلْأَعْلَى لَرَحْمَةً وَرَحْمَةً

 Thus, have We made of you an Ummah justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the Qiblah to which thou wast used, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels (From the Faith). Indeed it was (A change) momentous, except to those guided by Allah. And never would Allah Make your faith of no effect. For Allah is to all people Most surely full of kindness, Most Merciful”5.

Undoubtedly, justice is a position between two opposing sides, without picking any of the sides and not being bias or prejudice in making judgment or decision, and according to the above passage, this is position of Ummah. Therefore, there is a need for Muslim to become a religious, moral and civilizational witness over mankind, with the attributes of justice and moral excellence as the core attributes. The Qur’an has attested the principle of Justice when Allah says:

*إنَّ اللَّهَ يُقَضِّي عَدُوَّ الْإِنسَانِ وَالْجَهْرِ وَإِيَّاهُ ذَيَّ الْقُرْبَى* 

*وَيَتَحَكَّمُ عَنَّ الْفَحْشَاءَ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغِيَ يُعْطِيكُمْ لِعَلَّمَكُمْ نَذَّرَكُونَ* 6

“Indeed, Allah command justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and fords immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded”6

IV. AL-WASATIYAH IN WORLDLY AFFAIRS

Furthermore, al-wasatiyyah principle in the worldview of the Qur’an, extended to balance quality of Muslim between worldly affairs and hereafter. i.e the holy Qur’an which is the seal of the revelations of God invites man to enjoy bounties of Almighty Allah in this temporal world without any excessiveness, and it reminds him not to forget the importance of hereafter i.e man should try to integrate between the transitory world (Al-Dunya) and everlasting world (Al-Akhirah), in which the dunya-aspect must be related profoundly to the Akhirah-aspect in moderate manner, and in which the Akhirah-aspect has ultimate and final significance. This kind of wasatiyyah is clearly stated in the Qur’an when Allah said that:

5 Al-Qur’an: 2:143

6 Qur’an, Al Nahl: 90

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“O ye who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday (the Day of Assembly), hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of Allah, and leave off business (and traffic): That is best for you if ye but knew! And when the Prayer is finished, then may ye disperse through the land, and seek of the Bounty of Allah. and celebrate the Praises of Allah often (and without stint): that ye may prosper.”

The Principle of al-wasatiyyah and integration between worldly affairs and hereafter is again stated in another passage of the Qur’an when Allah said:

“Allah Kâbirî az-Zawalîmûn Nâfilâhûn”

“O ye who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday (the Day of Assembly), hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of Allah, and leave off business (and traffic): That is best for you if ye but knew! And when the Prayer is finished, then may ye disperse through the land, and seek of the Bounty of Allah. and celebrate the Praises of Allah often (and without stint): that ye may prosper.”

The Importance of al-wasatiyyah in Religion (With particular reference to Islam)

As we mention earlier, Islam is a religion that gives to each aspect of human life its due without any imbalance or exaggeration. The materials, social, spiritual, cultural, and intellectual aspects of human life are treated in a balance manner. Islam never asks people to focus only on the spiritual dimension or on the material dimension of their life. But it puts each dimension in its right place and legislates the necessary instruction to fulfill and meet the need of that particular dimension of human life. Therefore, this segment will exclusively explore the importance of al-wasatiyyah and moderation in religion with special reference to Islam. Indeed, it is important to note that, Extremism is not a new phenomenon, it can be found in all religions. With regard to Islamic community, its root can be found in the early history of Islam. As a matter of fact, there have been many extremist schools and sects, which have impact on other extremist groups. These groups have no consideration for the principle of al-wasatiyyah and moderation. In this respect, Al-Khawaarij and Al-Murjiah are the best known of early extremist groups. These two groups have gone extreme in their ideology and teaching, as they have deviated from the correct teaching of Islam that holds the principle of moderation. Hence, it is sufficed to say that Islam does not condone any sort of extremism, it rather invites people to enjoy moderation and al-wasatiyyah

Al Murjiah: They believe that actions are deferred from Iman (al-Irja). Thus, actions, according to them, are not part of it. Iman is simply the complying of the heart. The sinner, according to them, is a believer with complete Iman, even if he does what he does from the disobedient acts or he abandons what he abandons from the obedient acts.

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7 Al-Qur’an, 62:9-10
8 Al-Qur’an, 62:77
9 Al-Khawarij: are the ones who set out to kill Ali bin Abi Talib due to his rulership. Their methodology consists of freeing themselves from ‘Uthman and ‘Ali. They believe that the person who commits a major sin will remain in the Hellfire forever. They have branded all those who oppose them as unbelievers. They dare to heap curses on the Companions [Ashab] of the Prophet and on his Helpers.
The following hadith of the prophet Muhammad(p.b.u.h) is such a perfect example, that indicates the importance of al-wasatiyyah in Islam. Anas narrated, “A group of three men came to the houses of the wives of the Prophet asking how the Prophet worshipped Allah, and when they were informed about that, they considered their worship insufficient and said, "Where are we from the Prophet as his past and future sins have been forgiven." Then one of them said, "I will offer the prayer throughout the night forever." The other said, "I will fast throughout the year and will not break my fast." The third said, "I will keep away from the women and will not marry forever." Allah's Apostle came to them and said, "Are you the same people who said so? By Allah, I am more submissive to Allah and more afraid of Him than you; yet I fast and break my fast, I do sleep and I also marry women. So, he who does not follow my tradition in religion, is not from me (not one of my followers)." (Al-Bukhari).10

What a statement! This Hadith proves the importance of exercising al-wasatiyyah in Islam, not only in our social or economic or political fields, but it is also required in the field of religion. Therefore, a true Muslim should refrain from any excessiveness or exaggeration in the worship, (ibadah) or in religion. Indeed, as we argued earlier that extremism is a world phenomena it can be found in all religions, as such, Qur'an as a book of history, has narrated the absence of al-wasatiyyah in some of the followers of the previous religions with particular reference to people of the book(Jews and Christians) who happened to exaggerate in the nature of Jesus the son of Marry. According to the Qur’an

10 Sahih al-Bukhari

VI. MODERATION IN WORSHIP

Unlike extreme approach of some Jews and some Christians, Islam comes with moderate approach in order to make things easier for mankind. Although one must strictly fulfill its spiritual duties like offering prayers five times a day to get closer to the Almighty, fasting for sake of pleasing the Lord, performing Hajj etc. but one is also excused not to complete such acts being in a state of some difficulty. According to the holy Qur’an:
“O ye who believe! when ye prepare for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands (and arms) to the elbows; Rub your heads (with water); and (wash) your feet to the ankles. If ye are in a state of ceremonial impurity, bathe your whole body. But if ye are ill, or on a journey, or one of you cometh from offices of nature, or ye have been in contact with women, and ye find no water, then take for yourselves clean sand or earth, and rub therewith your faces and hands, Allah doth not wish to place you in a difficult, but to make you clean, and to complete his favour to you, that ye may be grateful”.  

It means that if someone has some problem and cannot accomplish the actually required level of cleanliness due to some unavoidable circumstances, there is no compulsion in this matter, and one can do as much as it can, as intentions decide the outcome of the deeds. Moreover, God, the Exalted says that He does not want to create any kind of complexity for us, rather He wishes only what is good for us. In short, the fact of the matter is that in Islam, there is no room for strictness in matters, and one can adopt moderation as much in carrying out religious action as required by it.

VII. MODERATION IN PERFORMING OUR PRAYER

As part of this, we should be moderate in our acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, and even charity. For example, our prayers should be recited in a moderate voice, neither too loud nor too soft. Allah said: “Do not recite too loudly in your prayer nor to softly, but seek a way between them”.

In this respect, Abu Musa reported: We were with the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, during a journey when the people began to exalt Allah loudly. The Prophet said:

O people, be gentle with yourselves for you are not calling upon one who is deaf or absent. Rather, you are calling upon the Hearing, the Seeing”. (Sahih al Bukhari)

Another example of the application of al-wasatiyyah in performing prayer by Rasulullah is obvious in his leadership of the prayer and Friday sermon. He would lead the prayer and deliver a sermon that were long enough for the people to absorb a meaningful lesson or reminder, but not so long that it would cause boredom or distress. In this regard Jabir ibn Samurah reported:

I was praying with the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, and his prayer was of moderate length and his sermon was of moderate length”. (sahih Muslim)

Regarding voluntary acts of worship, the Prophet encouraged his companions on many occasions to limit their extra worship so that they could take care of their duties to their families as well as maintain their health.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, moderation in Islam binds one to adopt sense of balance in every action, whether it is religious or social, individual or collective. al-wasatiyyah or moderation in all things is the most important advantage in Islam and the Muslim nation is a middle nation in the sense that it uses its full power in building, reforming, gaining profits, educating and teaching in moderate manner without any negligence or extravagance. Al-wasatiyyah is a sense of balance between the individual and the group, between life and religion, between the power of the mind and the power of the body, between idealism and realism, between spirituality and materialism… etc. In nutshell, as far as al-wasatiyyah and moderation in religion is concerned. It is

12 Al-Qur’an, 4:6

13 Al-Qur’an, 17:110
irreligious and ungodly to exercise extremism which is the act of
going beyond the normal or acceptable limit in the name of faith
and belief; because Islam as a seal of revealed religions never
encourage it, and indeed, extremism and its all manifestations are
completely opposed by the teaching of Islam.

IX. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Islam is a religion of *al wasatiyyah* and moderation; it
loves *wasatiyyah* on the ground that, the survival of
human being in this life and hereafter in Islamic
worldview, is strongly related to moderation.

2. Extravagant life and extremism are merely the inventions
of people, especially some people of the books (Jews and
Christians) who deviated from the right teaching of Torah
(*Torah*) and gospel (*Ingal*) respectively.

3. The act of extremism or radicalism in religion,
exaggerating in worship, overburden in da’wah and
Islamic missionary should be condemned in strongest
term by the Muslim *Ummah*, because it is neither the
teaching of Islam nor the act of Prophet Muhammad
(S.A.W).

4. Muslim leaders, economics, politicians administrators
academics, intellectuals, students families etc., should
always exercise this excellent value(al- wasatiyyah) and
avoid any sort of extremism in their routine activities,
moreover, the individuals, community, schools, media
ought to take a leading role in conveying this Islamic

5. There is a strong need of organizing a talks, lectures,
debates, workshops and conferences on the importance
of moderation and danger of extremism in the society.

REFERENCES


AUTHORS

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